

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0926
RODERICK TURNBULL/KANSAS CITY

JUNE 10, 1976

HARVESTING THE WHEAT

ANNCR:

FOR MONTHS, AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST ROD TURNBULL HAS BEEN VIEWING THE PROSPECTS FOR THIS YEAR'S WHEAT CROP IN THE UNITED STATES. NOW, FROM HIS VANTAGE POINT IN KANSAS CITY, HE SAYS THE FIRST OF THE CROP IS BEING CUT. VOICE:

THE WHEAT HARVEST FINALLY IS GETTING WELL STARTED IN THE UNITED STATES. THE CUTTING OF THE WHEAT ACTUALLY BEGAN LAST WEEK. BUT WET AND COOL WEATHER FORCED DELAYS, AND NOT UNTIL THE FIRST OF THIS WEEK, DID THE HARVEST REALLY GET GOING GOOD. (OPT) IN AMERICA, THE COMMON EXPRESSIONS USED WHEN THE HARVEST IS GOING GOOD IS TO SAY THAT THE HARVEST IS ROLLING OR THAT IT IS IN FULL SWING. (END OPT)

THIS HAS BEEN A PECULIAR YEAR AS FAR AS WEATHER IS CONCERNED, PARTICULARLY IN THE GREAT PLAINS AREA OF THE UNITED STATES WHERE MOST OF THE WHEAT IS GROWN. IN THE BIG WHEAT COUNTRY, THE WEATHER WAS RELATIVELY DRY -- EVEN TOO DRY IN PARTS OF KANSAS, TEXAS AND OKLAHOMA. THEN IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH, THE TEMPERATURES WERE UNUSUALLY WARM FOR THAT TIME OF THE YEAR. NEW CROP GROWTH WAS FAST, AND THERE WERE PREDICTIONS THAT THE WHEAT HARVEST THIS YEAR MIGHT BE AMONG THE EARLIEST EVER IN HISTORY. THE UNUSUAL WARM WEATHER THEN WAS FOLLOWED BY WEEKS OF UNUSUALLY COOL TEMPERATURES. IN FACT, IT STILL IS COOL FOR THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, PARTICULARLY AT NIGHT.

THE COOL WEATHER, PLUS RAIN, CHANGED THE HARVEST PROSPECTS ABRUPTLY. INSTEAD OF HAVING AN EARLY HARVEST,

THE CUTTING OF THE WHEAT IS GETTING UNDERWAY AT ABOUT THE NORMAL TIME, EVEN A LITTLE LATE IN PLACES. WHEAT FARMERS ARE COMMENTING THAT NATURE OR THE WEATHER HAS A WAY OF EVENING THINGS UP, AND THIS YEAR IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. AT ANY RATE, THE HARVEST NOW IS ROLLING IN TEXAS, THE BIG STATE IN THE SOUTHERN PLAINS. IT IS JUST BARELY GETTING STARTED IN OKLAHOMA, THE FIRST STATE NORTH OF TEXAS. AND BY THE MIDDLE OF JUNE OR PERHAPS JUNE TWENTIETH, IT SHOULD REACH KANSAS, THE NUMBER WHEAT STATE.

THE WHEAT HARVEST IN AMERICA ALWAYS HAS BEEN AN EXCITING PART OF THE FARM SCENE. BUT IT DOESN'T REQUIRE THE MANPOWER THAT WAS ONCE THE CASE WHEN THE FIELDS WERE CUT WITH HORSEDRAWN BINDERS, THE BUNDLES OF GRAIN PUT INTO SHOCKS AND LATER THRESHED IN THRESHING MACHINES. TODAY IT IS SAFE TO SAY ALMOST ALL OF THE WHEAT IS HARVESTED WITH COMBINES. THE COMBINES ARE BIG MACHINES THAT CUT AND THRESH THE WHEAT IN ONE OPERATION. THE WHEAT GRAIN IS TRANSFERRED FROM THE COMBINES TO A MOTOR TRUCK WHICH HAULS IT EITHER TO THE FARMER'S BINS OR TO HIS LOCAL STORAGE FACILITIES CALLED ELEVATORS.

MANY FARMERS OWN THEIR OWN COMBINES. OTHERS DEPEND ON WHAT ARE CALLED CUSTOM CREWS. THESE ARE HARVEST CONTRACTORS WHO OWN ONE OR SEVERAL COMBINES AND HIRE CREWS TO OPERATE THE MACHINES THROUGHOUT THE HARVEST SEASON -- FROM TEXAS IN THE SOUTH ON UP TO THE CANADIAN BORDER

A DISTANCE OF APPROXIMATELY 2500 KILOMETERS. THESE COMBINE OUTFITS, MANY OF WHICH ARE NOW WORKING IN TEXAS, WILL MOVE NORTH AS THE GRAIN RIPENS, FINISHING THEIR TASK IN LATE AUGUST OR EARLY SEPTEMBER. THE CUSTOM COMBINES CENTER THEIR EFFORTS IN THE BIG WHEAT COUNTRY OF THE PLAINS STATES AND IN THE NORTHWEST. NOT MANY OF THEM HIRE OUT TO SMALLER FARMERS IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE UNITED STATES.

THERE IS NO WAY OF TELLING HOW MUCH OF THE HARVEST IS ACCOMPLISHED BY THE FARMERS WITH THEIR OWN MACHINES AND HOW MUCH BY THE CUSTOM OPERATORS. THERE IS, OF COURSE, PLENTY OF WORK FOR ALL BECAUSE THE TOTAL WHEAT HARVEST IN THE UNITED STATES THIS YEAR WILL ENCOMPASS ABOUT TWENTY-SEVEN MILLION HECTARES, AND THE ESTIMATES NOW ARE THAT THE TOTAL YIELD WILL BE AROUND FIFTY-FOUR MILLION METRIC TONS.

GH/PBM